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Abstract

General guidelines are provided for planning and conducting study discussion groups. First, the value and the importance of discussion are asserted, followed by a consideration of how leadership, individual needs, and program content affect participation. Problems in communication, and those relating to the strategy and tactics commonly used in group discussion, are also explained, along with the kinds of action leaders should take to facilitate deliberation. Program evaluation procedures and objectives are also set forth. (ly)

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LEADING GROUP DISCUSSION

A Discussion Leader's Guide

Revised Edition

Syracuse University

PUBLICATIONS IN CONTINUING EDUCATION

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EDITORS' NOTES

Syracuse University's Publications in Continuing Education now incorporates programs initiated by the former Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults and the American Foundation for Continuing Education. Numerous requests are still being received at Syracuse for study-discussion guides developed by both these organizations.

Neither time nor funds were available to reproduce in full the two leadership guides, now out-of-print. The editors decided, therefore, to excerpt the most significant portions of the training course in Leading Group Discussion, prepared in 1955 by staff members of the CSLEA. The material was developed, written, and tested by Harry L. Miller and Barbara Berger, then of the Center staff. A. A. Liveright served as consultant during the evaluation-testing revision part of the project.

The following pages have been edited from the original to serve as "guide" rather than "course." Designed primarily to aid group leaders in the art of study-discussion, participants, too, can learn much that is insightful.

Doris S. Chertow

and

Sue G. Rubins, Editors

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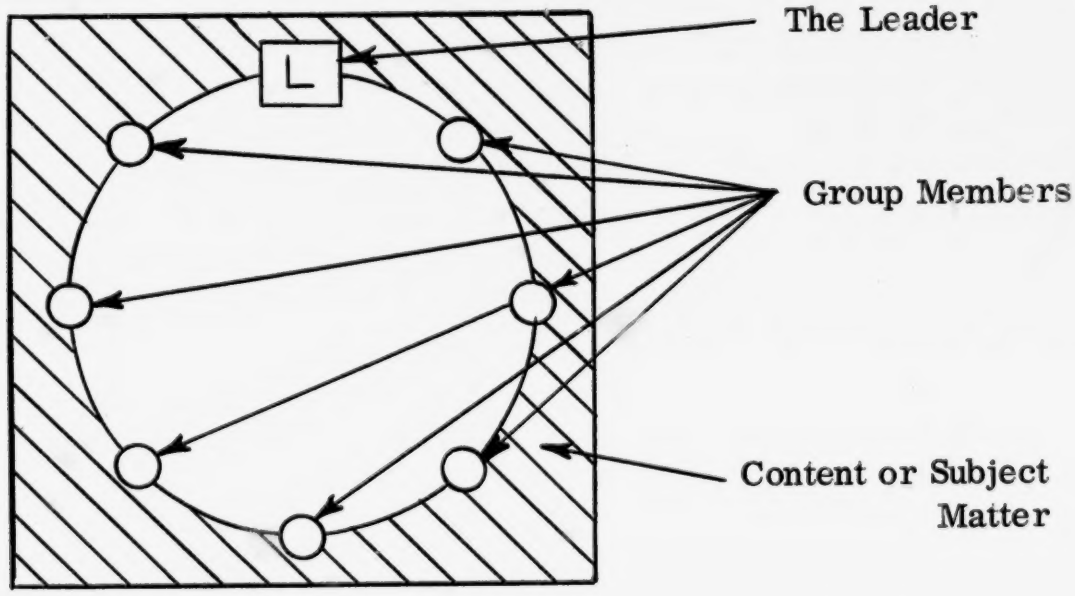
INTRODUCTION TO LEADING GROUP DISCUSSION

Discussion is a process which is used in many different ways, among which are: to reach decisions around a conference table; to come to agreement on a group action; to provide an opportunity for individual members of the group to learn. For our purposes it will be considered as a learning process, since action or decision-making is not an aim of most study-discussion groups. Neither do the people involved in the programs come merely to engage in a bull session , to enjoy discussion for its own sake; they come with definite expectations of learning and of developing themselves.

Although the discussion group is by no means the only situation in which learning can and does occur, it is unique in one important respect. In all other learning situations, the individual and the material from which he learns are the only components required, and the learning consists of direct communication between the two.

In a discussion group, on the other hand, other people are also involved. Not only are there other members present but leadership of some kind is also essential. While the person reading a book, seeing a film, listening to a lecture, is interacting only with the ideas presented, the member of a discussion group is also interacting with others in the group and with the leader. Learning through discussion is a far more complicated situation, involving cooperative effort as well as self-discipline.

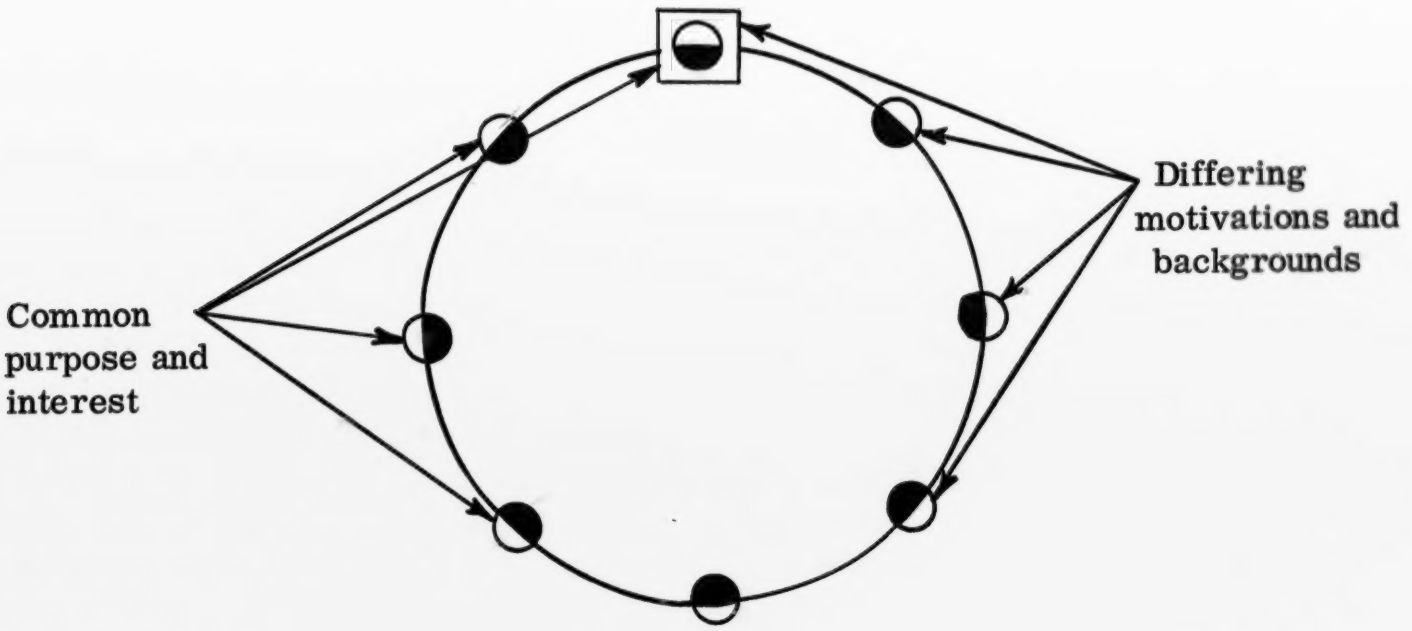
Because of the complex nature of the discussion group situation, it may be helpful to look briefly at the total situation in terms of three of its basic components: (1) Group, (2) Leadership, and (3) Content (or Subject Matter). Taken together, these may be represented as the "Learning Situation" in a discussion group and can be represented in this manner:



Although each of these will be examined in turn, the chart above should illustrate that each functions not in isolation but in a dynamic interrelationship with the others. They are not the only influences on the discussion learning situation; there are other elements outside the group which affect the learning of the participants, such as climate of thinking in the community, local and national attitudes toward freedom and inquiry. But for our purposes, we can concern ourselves only with those factors

which can be controlled.

1. Group. The group is made up of a number of individuals, each of whom brings to the learning situation somewhat different motivations, a different background of experience, and a different personality. These aspects of the individuals that make up the group set them apart from each other, and are represented by the portions outside of the circle.



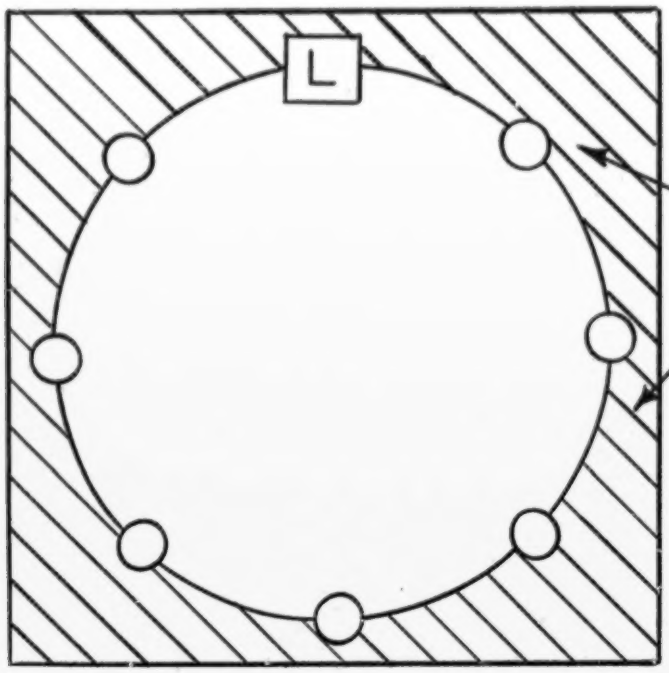
At the same time that each of these individuals differs from the others, all of them have something in common, the area of common purposes represented by the portion within the circles. There is a common desire to learn, an interest in the same subject, a preference for learning with others rather than by themselves.

2. Leadership. In most discussion groups one person is designated as the formal leader and is expected to assume the responsibilities of leadership. In some programs leadership is rotated from one session to another so that at each session a different person acts as the formal leader. In neither case, however, does this mean that the formal or designated leader performs all of the leadership functions which are necessary for an effective discussion-learning situation. Effective discussion requires that the leadership role be shared by the group members.

Referring to the chart above, it is important that as a program progresses or a session develops, the leader create a situation in which the differences between him and group members are decreased and whereby different members of the group may assume those leadership roles (such as clarification, summarizing, pressing for agreement) which come most naturally to them.

Just as different individuals bring different resources and personalities to the group experience, so do leaders vary. Leadership style depends largely upon the attitudes and personality of the leader, but it is also determined to some extent by the demands of the program itself, since different content and goals may require alternative styles of leadership.

3. Content. Every group is organized around some specific content, and has a learning goal which involves that content. If the group is really working toward its accepted goal, then everything it does has some relevance to the content. One way of seeing this is to think about the group as within a field of content which provides a focus for its effort. To the extent that subject matter makes different demands on both the leader and the group it is an important determinant of the effectiveness of the discussion group.



Some recent research into how people learn concluded that students generally learn practically nothing during the first session of a course; they are much too busy studying the new people around them, measuring themselves against "those others," deciding how they like the instructor, or leader, and, in general, trying to become comfortable in new surroundings. The next best thing to skipping the first session altogether, if that were only possible, is to make the process of settling down as pleasant and useful as possible.

But we ought to be bold enough to ignore the advice of the research mentioned above, and bring up a question with real substance to it: what motivates people to join discussion study groups, to desert their roles as solitary learners (for a part of the time, at least), and to become parts of a learning group?

The Value and Importance of Discussion

An eminent Canadian producer of documentary films who was assigned during the war to make a series of films about the values of democracy complained that it was an almost impossible job: "There just isn't anything dramatic or exciting about a group of people talking together."

He was right, of course, from his point of view; the kind of surface drama that

the camera demands is simply not there, except for the people who are involved in the talk. For them it can be a very exciting and stimulating experience, combining as it does the gratifying tensions of interacting with other people with the feeling of accomplishment or personal growth.

A great deal of talk, aimed at accomplishing a number of vastly different purposes, goes on in American society. There is official talk, of course, some of it good, the rest of the kind that The New Yorker merrily likes to quote under the heading of "Wind on Capitol Hill." An incredible amount of talk is involved as Americans go about the business of trying to achieve their special interests.

Steadily increasing attention in American communities has been given to making discussion more useful and more effective. Most of this effort, by adult education agencies of all kinds, universities, and other groups too numerous to mention, has been aimed at helping people talk more effectively and work together better on problems of getting something done: increasing productivity, getting members of various special interest organizations to participate in the work to be done, making directing boards of organizations more efficient and democratic. In all of these cases there is a group, small or large, trying to get things done and meeting problems on the way; what is new is that attention is now being focused on the human relations aspect of the problems they meet, in the difficulties involved in people's getting together to plan and make decisions about their activities.

In the welter of getting things done, less attention has been paid to the third kind of talk, discussion which involves personal growth in understanding and enjoyment of the self and the complex world about the self. It is only very recently that study-discussion programs have been designed to provide opportunities in this neglected area. These discussion programs seek to help the individual in two ways and grow out of two major concerns about what is happening to American society.

First, we have retreated a great distance from the old ideal of the relations of the individual to government. In this version, public opinion, the "general will" of a people, arises through the discussions of innumerable small circles of citizens. As C. Wright Mills puts the classic process, "The people are presented with problems. They discuss them. They decide on them. They formulate viewpoints. These viewpoints are organized, and they compete. One viewpoint 'wins out.' Then the people act out this view, or their representatives are instructed to act it out, and this they promptly do." What has happened is that we are now seeing a movement toward monopoly of opinion control and manipulation. There is little opportunity to organize the type of discussion circle in which opinion is formed and issues decided.

Second, we live in a period in which the individual's life span is growing spectacularly longer than it ever has been. The life span and the period of economic usefulness used to coincide, but they do so no longer; we are growing generations of older persons with long years of leisure time ahead of them. But our education, generally, prepares people for the more practical tasks of life. People need, therefore, to have inner resources developed before they get old, so they can use the leisure and make it a rich period in their lives.

Getting Acquainted

There is at least one primitive tribe in which people are very reluctant to tell their names because if a sorcerer should by any chance have one's name, he would have a terrible power over him. Americans tend, if anything, to lean in the opposite direction, and making sure that everyone knows everyone else's name at any gathering has become almost a fetish. For a discussion group, however, introductions serve a very useful purpose, and they should not be viewed merely as a courtesy which ought to be accomplished as rapidly as possible.

For one thing, as you will see later when we deal with leadership and group climate, people who know one another can maintain the informality and permissiveness which are important elements in free discussion. Even more important, perhaps, is the fact that properly conducted introductions can supply to the group two significant kinds of information about its members:

The reasons people have for joining the group (and therefore some clues for what the discussions ought to focus on).

The experience which people have had with the general subject to be discussed (and therefore an indication of resources which the group can later draw on).

What Brings People to Discussion Groups--What Do They Get Out of Them?

There are a vast number of reasons that people give for joining a discussion group. Some of the general ones are noted in the following excerpt from Ida Hill's "Why Group Discussion?"

Motivation and Goals: "In a very real sense teachers of children and youth have a captive audience. Much of what children are expected to learn, they are told, will come in very handy when they are old enough to work, to vote, to marry.

Members of adult groups have worked, have voted, and have married. They are not being taught by someone who has lived more than they. They have, ready made, the kind of motivation that teachers of the young break their hearts trying to create.

Through discussion a group of adults can explore a subject and find a level of working and talking that has meaning for them. And they can obtain satisfaction through the excitement of achievement at any age if the goal is considered worthy of the labor it demands.

No teacher is wise enough to sense what is in the minds of adults, what their needs are, what they think they want to learn. He must try to discover their motivations by listening to them. People who are learning what they want to learn will be loyal to, not truant from, their groups."

All Sides of the Question: "A poem can have many meanings, a world crisis a multitude of causes, a social problem a variety of solutions. When the learner is exposed to the range of ideas that can be brought to bear on any subject by the members of a discussion group, that subject is enhanced and broadened. Rather than one point of view, he has many to examine, to compare with his own, to

accept or reject. The mental exercise is stimulating."

An Open Mind: "The years of experience that have built the resources and ideas the adult brings to the discussion group have resulted, as well, in attitudes and biases that are in need of re-examination and change. As long as these remain private and unacknowledged, the person can manipulate and distort new ideas or knowledge to fit them. Once he expresses his attitudes in words, and gives others a chance to examine them, it is much more difficult for him to deny them himself. A mind cannot remain completely closed when its contents are shared."

Overcoming Apathy: "An important aim of education in a democracy is to produce citizens who are interested in the challenging problems of our times and who will participate in solving them. Many people refuse to be concerned with these problems because they have come to feel that the individual is too insignificant to do anything about them. Overcoming this kind of apathy is difficult. A member who sees his fellows in the group trying to understand these problems, seriously concerned over the solutions, and feeling responsibility to act, may be stimulated to try also.

The people who promote discussion groups can justify them with these arguments, and there is experimental evidence for some of them. But adults don't give up their precious leisure and take part in discussion groups for these reasons alone. Let us look at some of the reasons why people get more fun and satisfaction from discussion groups than from other kinds of class settings."

Self-Discipline: "Some people admit that, although they genuinely want to learn, it takes a group to jar them out of their mental laziness. Once they have committed themselves, have assumed some responsibility for a group by becoming a member of it, they cannot let the group down. Thus, a feeling of membership in the group, added to their initial motivation, produces a higher order of preparation."

The Need For People: "In our modern urban society some people find themselves isolated--unable to find human companionship on anything but the most superficial level. Man is a gregarious animal. He needs to feel that he is important to others--that they care about him as a person. A discussion group where the members learn to talk freely together and find areas of common interest and concern can help to meet this need."

To Think For Oneself: "It is tragic that we have among us in a democratic society people who have not experienced the satisfaction that comes from advancing an exciting idea or a creative insight. There are people who feel that all the ideas worth having are in a book or in an expert's head. In a stimulating discussion where people listen to each other carefully and critically, where members are expected to have ideas of their own, and where people try to understand each other, this attitude can be quickly dispelled."

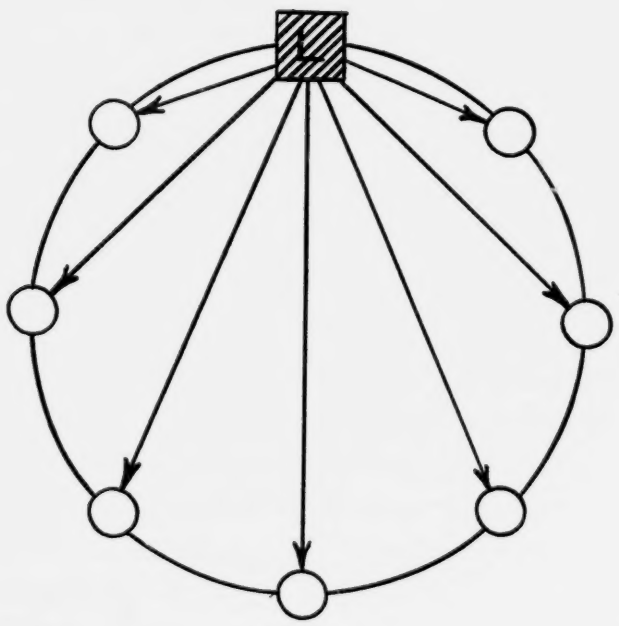
Human Relations Skills: "Before a person can be expected to participate in the solution of problems existing in his job, his family, or his society, he must have some confidence in his competence both in having ideas and in expressing them. He must have analytical and critical abilities as well as creativity. He must

know when to look for facts, where to find them, and how to share them with others. He must realize that the others in the situation have needs, just as he has them, to be understood and accepted. He must be able to defend his values, and be willing to modify them. He must know that much disagreement grows out of misunderstanding. He needs skills in all these ways. Adults want to be effective in their dealings with others. A discussion group can give them practice in human relations skills

Leaders of discussion groups and those responsible for sponsoring the groups are aware of the values this method has for individual learning. They should know, as well, that the discussion group can have many values which are related to the emotional gratification, self-esteem, and personality growth of the members. To be unaware of the latter is to undermine effectiveness in achieving the former." 1

PARTICIPATION: FOCUS ON LEADERSHIP

A number of forces influence the participation of group members in a discussion. Many of these forces can only be recognized and dealt with to the best of our ability; but there is not much one can do about them. The individual needs that group members bring with them, and the content of the discussion, for example, are both factors which one can do little to change. They are "given." However, one important influence on group participation <u>can</u> be changed, and that is leadership. The leader does have control over his own behavior, and if he is aware of the ways in which his behavior determines the participation of the group, he can do something about it.



What Is Effective Participation?

Often the major anxiety which plagues discussion leaders is a concern for getting everyone to talk. It arises from the over-zealous notion that the discussion is a failure if everyone is not participating actively and often. But participation can be

silent, and the silent member may be getting a great deal out of the discussion. The leader, then, can best encourage maximum participation not by making sure that everyone is talking, whether he wants to or not, but by doing everything possible to create the conditions which make people feel free to come in when they want to.

In attempting to secure effective participation there are several other points to bear in mind:

First, quality of participation is more important than quantity of participation. Participation can probably best be measured in terms of the kinds of contributions made by members of the group: the extent to which there is a flow of one idea contributed to another; the degree to which members of the group are applying the content to their own interests and concerns; and the extent to which they are furthering the thinking and understanding of the group. All of these are more important than a mere check of the number of contributions that an individual does or does not make.

Second, the kind of participation may well change as a program develops. Participation may be important at early stages of the program, and worth stimulation by the leader. Group members need to know that their contributions will be welcomed and that differing opinions will be accepted. This kind of participation is a demonstration that the members of the group have an obligation to help to carry the program. In the beginning, also, it may be important to look for simple situations which will permit the more shy and retiring members of the group to talk so that they may have the satisfaction and security of knowing that they can participate. It is also to be expected, at first, that member participation will be more in terms of responses to, and ideas aimed at, the leader - since this is the traditional way that most people have acted in the past in learning situations. As the program evolves, however, participation should develop so that less and less of the contributions are made directly to the leader and more and more grow out of general discussion carried on directly by members themselves. Another changing aspect of participation relates to the fact that more and more participation by members will be in terms of assuming some of the leadership roles and less in terms of the old school-room "student-to-teacher" relationship.

Third, the importance of effective and intelligent listening as a means of participation cannot be over-emphasized. To participate verbally it is first necessary to participate by listening. Only then will a contribution be such that it will further the discussion and work towards the goals of the group.

Fourth, different people contribute in different ways and therefore participation by all members cannot be uniform or standard. Some members of the group participate most helpfully when the group is bogged down, others when things are going smoothly. Some can act best as authorities and resource people, others as persons who raise doubts and questions. And the same person may not even participate in the same way on two different days.

Here are some other characteristics of effective participation which are often used by people who have studied the problems of discussion:

No one is permitted to monopolize discussion.

Discussion is for the most part carried on among members of the group rather than just between members and the leader.

The group does not break down into cliques or sub-groups which tend to impede or complicate general discussion.

High quality participation is evident rather than emphasis on participation merely for its own sake.

An air of objectivity is maintained--that is, discussion is focused on ideas, not on personalities.

Members are attentive and respectful of contributions of all members (including direct member to member discussion) rather than relying solely on the leader to maintain order and attention.

Members understand the importance of listening to others and understanding what they say as a prerequisite for active participation themselves.

Contributions and suggestions by group members are accepted and utilized in an adult and friendly manner both by the leader and members of the group.

Differing opinions, points of view, experiences, and backgrounds are accepted and valued, rather than frowned upon or rejected.

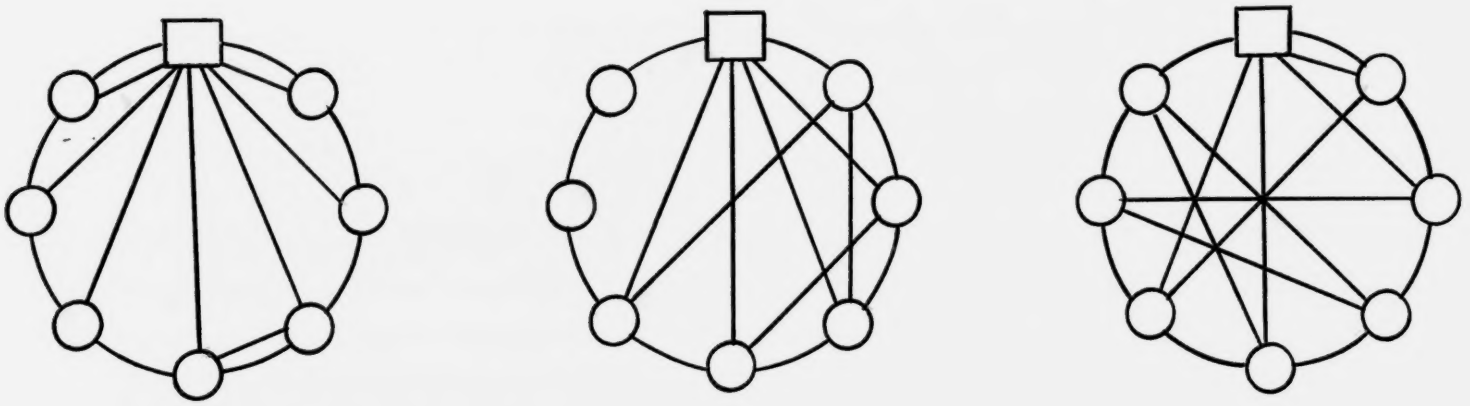
Contributions of all members are accepted on the basis of their value or pertinency rather than on the basis of the social status of the person making the contribution.

Accounts of personal experiences are encouraged and permitted only insofar as they are relevant to the discussion.

Members assume or share various leadership functions with the leader: helping the leader and each other by clarifying various points made; pushing for facts and data underlying expressed opinions; carrying discussion forward toward agreed-upon goals; dealing with troublesome members.

Analyzing Participation

As was underlined in the preceding section, measuring the quantity and direction of participation of a group will give only limited data concerning many of the points just listed. It is, nevertheless, useful to keep a sharp eye on the participation level because it may ring a warning bell on some major difficulties. For this reason it is sometimes a good idea to have one member chart the number of people participating, the amount of talking done by individuals, the extent to which attention is general rather than directed to the leader. A fairly accurate picture can be obtained by having one of the group observe the discussion and the flow of conversation. By means of these diagrams, for instance, it is easy to see that for one reason or another Group I is centering its attention on the leader; in Group II participation is restricted with only a few people carrying the ball; and in Group III participation is general.



I LEADER DOMINATED II RESTRICTED INTERACTION III GENERAL INTERACTION

Effects of Leadership on Group Participation

Now if the leader were to permit himself to think constantly about the many complex elements that determine the participation of the group, he would shortly find himself paying exorbitant fees to the local head-shrinker. Fortunately, such concentrated attention to details is not necessary. The process can, instead, be considered in these terms: one can think of participation, generally, as being determined by the "climate" or "feeling tone" of a group, its overall emotional atmosphere, the feeling of easiness or uneasiness, freedom or restriction one gets as a member of it.

Group climate is determined by a number of things, but in a major way it is influenced by the behavior of the leader, his leadership style. Through his interaction with group members, he helps create an atmosphere which is interpreted by the group as being formal or casual, friendly or unfriendly, restrictive or free, objective or personalized. Because of his responsibility in the group, the leader also establishes a kind of model for participation; for example, if he is impatient with people, other members feel free to be so; if he is considerate of other people's views, considerateness is generally encouraged.

The free, relaxed climate which encourages the kind of participation we have been talking about can be achieved consciously, though it is not altogether easy to do sometimes, particularly when anxieties of the leader get in the way. But if the leader keeps aware of the need to maintain a climate which has the characteristics listed below, he will have little to worry about:

Friendliness - It is particularly necessary to establish friendliness in a group of comparative strangers. Getting to know other people in a strange group is sometimes an anxious process, and while it is going on, productivity is low. The leader's own attitude, his general friendliness, is an important example for the group in these early stages.

Acceptance - People need to feel that they are accepted as persons, no matter what their status. The feelings of everyone in the group must be accepted as of

equal worth for consideration, and each contribution must evoke some sort of response and recognition.

Permissiveness - This is almost the other side of the acceptance coin, because if people feel that their contributions are accepted, they will contribute when they want to. Permissiveness implies, however, not merely the acceptance of people, but an active encouragement of members to express both their thoughts and feelings.

Cooperativeness - If cooperativeness is to be achieved, the need of members to compete for personal recognition and status must be reduced. The real danger point here is the leader himself, who can easily permit himself to award approval and status, for which members will begin to compete. To the extent that the leadership role is shared by other members of the group, there will be a greater possibility of cooperativeness.

Objectivity- Being partisan about ideas, or points of view, is in this kind of discussion, of course, not only necessary but desirable. What is meant by objectivity here is the attitude of the group members to each contribution, and the attitude of each contributing member toward what he contributes. The most helpful attitude is that an idea or opinion, once expressed, becomes the property of all the members for them to evaluate and use in getting the group toward its goal. The objectivity needed is that which will sufficiently detach the contributor from his contribution so that the use which the group makes of it is not translated into a personal affront or personal triumph.

What about the leader? Should he be absolutely impartial? It seems unfair to make him a second-class citizen of the group, and if he tries to act as though he had no opinions, he may still influence the discussion in unconscious ways. Of course, when the balance in the group between work and emotionality is precarious, as in arguments, the leader's opinions would be disastrous; he must develop judgment about when his over-all responsibility for coordinating the discussion is more important than his right to participate as a group member.

Questions to Consider

1. How freely did members participate? Did everybody contribute? Did just a few members contribute? Did most members contribute?
2. Did some people do more talking than others? Did anyone talk too much?
3. Are the most loquacious people sitting together and the relatively silent ones also?
4. Did members talk mostly to the leader? (notice how the lines converge on page 10)
5. Was talking directed to particular members rather than to the group as a whole?
6. Was there any pairing or evidence of cliques?

PARTICIPATION: FOCUS ON INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

In the preceding section where leadership was the main focus, participation was discussed in general "group" terms, as though some abstraction, made up of a number of individuals, could participate. Everyone is aware that to talk about such an abstraction as a "group" is partly a convenience; actually, present around the table is a number of individuals with different reasons for being there, who view the world through unique spectacles deeply colored by their own wishes, needs, fears and hopes.

Each member of the discussion group is constantly engaged in two kinds of problems:

1. His efforts to achieve his avowed aim for being there--learning to appreciate literature or art, become a more knowledgeable citizen, sharpen his thinking, etc.

2. His efforts to resolve his hidden problems of adapting to other people, of anxiety about what other members think of him, etc.

The following paragraphs focus exclusively, then, on the influence upon over-all participation of the ways in which the individual acts to deal with these problems. It concerns both the common aims which are inside the circle and the individual needs and concerns of each individual outside the circle.

What Are Needs?

We are using the term "needs" in a special sense here, so some explanation is desirable. It is useful to restrict the meaning of the term to emotional needs which lead people to behave in ways leading to satisfaction; just as, in the area of physical needs, faint, almost unfelt, stirrings in the stomach will lead a person on a familiar route to the refrigerator. This is quite different from one familiar use of the word, as when one says, "That boy needs a good kick in the pants!" The boy probably, in our sense, "needs" no such thing; he may need some sympathetic attention the lack of which is creating his obstreperous behavior. The only need which the remark indicates, in our sense, is the need of the person speaking to express his aggression.

Whole systems of psychology, as a matter of fact, have been built on defining the needs of individuals. One of these identifies "four wishes" which seem to be deeply felt by all members of our society: security, new experience, recognition (status), and emotional response. These general needs are expressed variously by different individuals; some people can only feel secure, for example, in dominating others; some find security in being dependent on others. Some express their need for recognition by talking constantly about themselves; others have strong drives toward achieving titles or position.

The participation of individual members in the discussion reflects their attempts to satisfy their characteristic needs. Some individuals, for example, who are dominated by a strong need for security, may not participate at all until they feel secure enough in the group to express themselves. Others, with a strong need for recognition,

try to "take over" the group and over-participate.

The Individual and the Group

Thus, one main purpose of the individual, that of adapting to the other members in ways which satisfy his emotional needs, gets handled on a level which cannot be influenced by the discussion leader. People tend to develop behaviors which meet their needs and then cling to them, whether they make other people unhappy or not, whether they get in the way of constructive work or not. And whatever the discussion leader's function may be, it is not to help people out of their emotional difficulties.

But the individual, as we have pointed out, has a second purpose: his avowed aim of learning more about some subject, increasing his ability to think, improving himself in some way. These two purposes may complement each other but they may come into conflict. Satisfying some emotional need may interfere with achieving his self-educational aim.

Finally, since the individual shares his educational aims with other members of the group, it is useful to think of the group, also, as having needs, needs for certain kinds of behavior necessary to accomplish its work.

In this view of participation, then, one can think of any individual contribution to the discussion as satisfying one of two different kinds of needs:

1. An individual, emotional need of one of the members; for example, to gain status, to find security by dominating, etc.
2. A group need for accomplishing the work necessary to reach a common goal; for example, a need for different points of view to be harmonized, a need for clarification of confusion, etc.

Both individual and group needs are met by some action of an individual so one can think of such actions, for the sake of convenience, as roles which people play in a group.

What the Leader Can Do

When discussion leaders talk about their problems, they often begin by talking about what can be done about the "difficult" person, the discussion monopolizer, or the one who comes in constantly with irrelevant remarks. What has already been said here provides some clues for the leader to follow in handling these situations.

First, the material on group climate is very relevant. Anything the leader does, in a general way, to reduce those elements in the group situation which create anxieties will decrease to some extent behavior which is the expression of irrelevant individuals needs. A permissive, friendly, accepting climate will, paradoxically, increase the ability of the group to concentrate on the problem at hand.

Second, the leader can very often use such irrelevant expressions as an indicator of the state of the discussion. That is, a puzzling or disruptive contribution by one member can be viewed as an expression of the way the whole group feels at that time. Consider, for example, a situation in which two members of the group are "fighting."

Not examining two different points of view in order to advance the group's purpose of achieving clarity, but arguing for the sake of gratifying their impulses toward aggression. Now, if the group sits passively and watches, the other members must be enjoying the situation so the argument must be expressing aggression they, too, are feeling; if a member steps in to try to stop the fight, he will be seen by the group as joining it. A hot argument which the group permits to continue may signal some sort of frustration felt generally by the group and taken out by it in enjoyment of the fight.

In the same way, again, an irrelevant remark may indicate that the group is not clear about what kind of contribution is appropriate at the time. A confused contribution may mean that the group has no clear idea of its purpose in going into a particular phase of the discussion. The leader can help the discussion over many rough spots if he will be alert to the significance of individual behavior for the feelings of the entire group.

Some of the most common problems encountered in handling "difficult" individuals in groups have been given considerable study. Noted below are some concrete suggestions for handling difficulties arising from individual need behavior; they may be helpful if in a given situation the general points made above do not seem to apply.

The Dead Silence - The most general, and most anxiety-producing, problem is the awkward silence, a complete absence of participation. It is important for the leader to realize that this probably reflects a wish on the part of the members to be prodded and relieved of responsibility. This is precisely, then, what the leader should avoid doing. While there is no "right" way to handle such silences, there are a few wrong ways, as when the leader tries to prod individuals into talking, or remains silent himself so that the situation turns into a contest of wills.

The leader can wait and see whether someone starts off, using his own judgment as to how long a wait is sensible. Encouraging remarks such as "There are probably some different points of view on this that would be interesting to get out on the table," can break the ice. If it persists, it is a good idea to turn attention to the process problem by asking, "What seems to be blocking us?" or "Maybe we had better find out what the trouble is."

The Over-Talkative Member - Members who talk all the time or who go on endlessly each time they participate will, if permitted, monopolize the discussion. Usually a person who talks compulsively has a need to dominate. If you recognize this need, you will probably be less irritated by the behavior and better able to handle the situation. Since the group must be protected from domination by any one member, the leader must intervene if the group does not try to prevent it. If a participant is monopolizing the time which should be shared among the other members, the leader can interrupt, acknowledge the contribution, and suggest that "we hear from some other members who, I am sure, also have something to say about this." Usually consistent intervention of this kind will be sufficient to make a member aware of what he is doing and better able to control his need to talk. When the problem cannot be resolved satisfactorily, it can be discussed with the whole group in an evaluation session avoiding reference to any particular members.

The Silent Member - The silent member is usually shy and fearful. What he is most afraid of is being put on the spot, being forced to participate. If he is pressured into taking an active part, he will rightfully feel resentful. It is wise never to force, but rather to let him take his time about contributing. You can, however, observe the silent member to detect signs of readiness on his part to speak. If a member seems to be on the verge of speaking, an encouraging glance or friendly nod may be all he needs. Sometimes a brief chat after a meeting where you let a member know that the group is interested in hearing from him when he is ready will make him feel freer to participate the next time. There is no one way of encouraging participation.

Occasionally silence may reflect boredom or lack of interest. If you are fairly sure that this is the case, you might wish to draw out the participant by asking him a provocative and challenging question.

Asking Questions to Stimulate Participation

The kinds of questions the leader asks and the manner in which he poses the question has a lot to do with stimulating participation. In the beginning of a discussion program, with a new group, the leader will probably place major emphasis on creating a climate which will encourage participation. He will want to ask the kinds of questions and state them in such a manner that even the most reluctant member of the group will feel he can make a contribution. As the program develops and such a climate has been developed, the leader will probably think more of using questions which will stimulate intelligent and logical thinking.

At this point let us examine further the kinds of questions which will encourage maximum participation. There are several very simple rules to observe in this connection:

1. Do not ask questions which tend to put people on the spot by checking the amount of information they have on a particular point. (This will draw out only the members of the group who have a store of facts and information and will inhibit the others.)

2. Do not use questions which merely call for a "yes or no" - or "agree or disagree" - answer. Such questions do not stimulate disucssion and merely set a pattern whereby members of the group feel that their role is one of being led - or misled - by the leader.

3. Do not ask questions which are so vague and wide-open that members of the group don't know what you want them to discuss. This will lead to confusion and will inhibit any general participation.

4. In the beginning of the program select questions which deal with experiences or opinions which any member of the group might discuss emphasizing that everyone's opinion is of interest or importance. At the very outset of a program it may be well to go around the table soliciting opinions or experiences

of group members. In this way everyone in the group will make some contribution (no matter how small) and will have the experience of participating. Since the first attempt to say something is frequently the most difficult, this procedure provides a built-in method which permits everyone to take part.

5. It is expecially important that the leader accept the contributions made by all of the members, that he try to tie them into the general trend of discussion and that he give each member the feeling he really has contributed something to the thinking of the group. This will be effective not only in letting all of the members feel that they have made a worthwhile contribution but also it will help to set a climate of acceptance which will encourage further participation.

Relating these rules to the needs of individual members of the group, it is important for the leader to ask questions which relate to, and will satisfy, the emotional needs of the members. As the program progresses and members feel they belong to the group, the leader can increasingly ask the kinds of questions which relate to group needs for accomplishing the work necessary to reach the common goals.

Analyzing Member Roles

The effectiveness of a discussion group, as we have pointed out, depends partly on the roles which members are filling, helpful roles or obstructive roles. Roles should be distinguished from personalities; if instead of thinking about "problem people," the leader concentrateson what certain kinds of behavior contribute or do not contribute to the discussion, his own action as a leader is likely to be more objective and, therefore, more effective. People do not, in any event, play the same role at all times in a group, although we have a tendency to stereotype people into such roles. The following role descriptions are of behavior that may help or hinder the group:

Positive Roles

Brings discussion back to the point

Seeks further opinions from the group

Seeks clarification of meaning when ideas expressed are not clear

Questions and critically evaluates ideas expressed

Challenges reasoning or logic when soundness seems doubtful

Introduces new angles or aspects of topic for consideration

Summarizes or makes transition to a new point

Points out areas of disagreement and agreement

Tries to resolve or clarify conflict in the group

Evaluates progress of the group

Introduces facts or information

Seeks further information

Probes for the reasons behind opinions expressed

Negative Roles

Aggressively expresses disapproval of acts or feelings of others

Attacks the group or the problem it is working on

Disagrees or opposes without or beyond "reason"

Attempts to maintain or bring back an issue after the group has rejected it

Calls attention to himself through boasting or recounting personal achievements, or consistently irrelevant combination

Makes a display of lack of interest in group's job through horseplay, cynicism, etc.

Tries to assert authority or superiority by giving directions authoritatively, interrupting the contributions of others, etc.

Tries to evoke "sympathy" response by expressions of insecurity, depreciation of himself beyond "reason," etc.

Hides his own prejudices or biases from the group by pleading for stereotypes like the "small businessman," grassroots community," "labor," etc.

PARTICIPATION: FOCUS ON CONTENT AND MATERIALS

This is perhaps the most important section because it deals with the central problem for the discussion leader--the work of the discussion group. Every discussion group is organized around some specific content or subject matter; each of them is studying something.

But the "somethings" are different, and the differences make varied demands on the group discussing them and on the things which the leader of the group ought to keep in mind for doing an effective job. It seems pretty clear that in order to help one another discuss modern art the members of a discussion group ought to participate somewhat differently than they do when they are discussing foreign trade, or whether the cost of living is going to rise next year.

The following paragraphs deal with the participation of the members of a discussion group in the context of the kind of questions they are discussing.

"Work" and "Non-work"

The "work" of a discussion group as distinguished from any number of other kinds of groups is the production of a sort of "group wisdom" so that the understanding of each individual about a particular problem or subject is increased. Other kinds of groups discuss in order to arrive at group decisions that must be carried out; their work, then, is decision-making and a very complicated business it is, too. But no

less complicated is the work of the study-discussion groups--group thinking.

The problems that arise when one tries to do thinking in a group, instead of as an individual, are very similar to the general problems of doing any kind of work in a group. A group of men who decide to build a community tennis court, for instance, have first of all agreed to a common goal, as have the members of a discussion group. They must then agree on a certain order of work steps--to measure first, then dig, then fill in, and so on. Some members of the group are most valuable during the digging operation, others have a certain knack with a roller; so that the value of the contribution of each member to the work may depend on what the group is working on at a given time. All of these activities, including the reaching of agreements of various sorts, are work. They move the group along toward the goal of a finished tennis court.

At certain times the working group may get tired and start kidding around; or two members who have a private backyard feud may have an argument that not only keeps them from working but stops the work of the whole crew; or they may all just knock off for a well-deserved beer and exchange sociable opinions about the world series. During all these periods whether the lapse is necessary or unnecessary, the group is not working, but doing something else: socializing, fighting, escaping, or whatever.

Discussion groups, in a rather more complicated fashion, can be looked at in the same way. If the group is talking about what it ought to do or how it should go about doing it, or is actually exploring problems it has agreed to consider as a group, it is working. Look at an example of a group which is not working. Suppose the discussion has been about whether the United States ought to increase its aid to foreign countries. Two general opinions have emerged: one insisting that we will lose the "cold War" if we do not help build up the under-developed countries both economically and politically; the other arguing that it makes no sense to give away large sums of money and material, that consitute a serious drain on the American taxpayer, to countries remaining persistently ungrateful. Two irreconcilable views, hotly argued. Suddenly someone cracks a joke, which reminds someone else of a long story, that he proceeds to tell, which in turn recalls an interesting trip another person has taken to California, hardly relevant to a discussion of foreign aid.

Even if the group is interested in the stories and laughs at the joke, it has stopped working. A reasonable explanation of such a situation might be that the group is frustrated because it doesn't know how to get out of facing two such opposite views. It is a lot more fun to listen to a joke than to feel frustrated--more gratifying. Faced with frustration, most individuals either get angry or try to escape. In the same way most groups meet a frustrating discussion situation by arguing or escaping into pleasant sociability. Sometimes such activity is necessary to relieve the tension of concentrating on a hard task or trying to solve a problem; no group can work all the time, because the variety of individual needs people bring to a group must have some outlet. A group that has worked together a long time and has successfully ironed out its problems alternates between short bursts of sociability, joking, or fighting, and long periods of concentration on the job at hand. The emotional satisfactions in the brief flights from the work can, indeed, provide a stimulating push.

There are several important lessons for a discussion leader that may be drawn

from these brief remarks. They are: First, no matter how well-motivated a group is and how interested in the topic at hand, there will always be some periods when the group is not working but is letting off steam, relaxing, or dealing with personal or emotional problems. Second, these periods of not working are necessary and essential to the further development of a group and are required to deal with the personal, social, and emotional needs that are bound to develop in a permissive situation. Third, if a particular group is not working at a particular time there is a reason for this behavior. It is important for the leader to try to understand the reasons underlying this flight from work and to be sensitive to them. Do they have different understandings of what they are trying to do? Is the particular discussion over their heads and are they unable to cope with it? Is the group frustrated over the behavior of some member and does it feel that it is unable to deal with this member adequately? Or, have they just been sitting too long so that their minds are unable to absorb more than their seats can endure? Fourth, the leader must not try to recall the members sternly to the task, nor must he too rapidly try to change behavior that is probably necessary and important at the time. It is his task to try to understand what is causing the non-work situation and to work with the members of the group to eradicate the cause (frustration, weariness, irritation) rather than deal with the manifestation (the joke, the argument) directly.

How Content Affects Group Participation

The problems a leader faces in order to help the group solve its work problems are shaped partly by the kind of work to be done, by the kinds of questions posed by the content being discussed. A group of writers trying to put together a radio show give a very different impression at their work from that of a board of directors at an annual meeting. Their tasks are completely different and make different demands in order for work to be done. Similarly, a discussion of modern art can seem spectacularly different, to the person leading it, from a discussion of United States foreign policy.

Not only is the way in which the group must work different, but the way in which it does not work will tend to differ also. Consider an example. Group A is involved in a discussion of family and parent-child relationships in a number of different cultures. The problem of parent-child relations is so close to home that all members of the group can personalize the discussion. They will talk in terms of opinions and attitudes more than in terms of rigid facts or detailed information. They cannot help but become personally involved.

In this situation the leader will work to build an atmosphere of acceptance and a strong group feeling which will provide acceptance for emotional statements and for personal feelings, which are bound to arise in such a discussion. He will probably permit considerable freedom-checked primarily by the group itself-so that the group members can discuss what is really of concern and interest to them.

Group B is discussing problems of international relations. The problem of international relations is, they realize, a serious one but very few of them can personalize it. It will probably become apparent that there is a need for more facts and information, that opposing positions and points of view which are generally held and actual

occurrences which have taken place must be further studied before useful and intelligent opinions and points of view can be arrived at or defended.

In this situation the leader will, of course, also be concerned about an acceptant and permissive atmosphere, but he will also be concerned about ensuring that the members of the group check their ideas and opinions against facts, that they seek to document their statements, that they refer to their sources of information. His role in this discussion will, of necessity, be much more one of challenging unsound ideas and impressions and of probing for, and demanding, facts and information than in the more opinion-centered discussion engendered by the parent-child material.

In these ways and in many others the task undertaken by the group will determine how its work must be done and the difficulties it is likely to meet.

Discussing Opinion Material

Many discussion programs are designed not to settle arguments or increase understandings of the meaning of certain facts, but to excite discussion, provoke inquiry, and inspire critical thought. Here the greatest danger is that the discussion might easily become a kind of bull-session, or devote itself to the unloading of opinions by everyone in the group without critical examination of any of them. Very often it becomes a matter of hurling "tis" against "taint." Because there is a wide range of views on the issues under discussion, a preliminary exploration of the whole range of opinion or values on the question is probably better than settling down immediately to discussion of extreme views.

This kind of discussion material can be very disturbing for a group which is not conscious of a very definite goal for its discussion. The leader may have to keep the group continually aware of whether it is at a given time doing what it really intended in the discussion. In this type of discussion, when the group is "not-working" it is likely to be fighting, because the issues under discussion often strike deeply at people's political or moral values. The leader might have to consider a suggestion to change activity (coffee break, time out, etc.) for a while.

COMMUNICATION

The past three sections have concentrated on aspects of participation - what the leader and the members of the group could do to increase the quality and quantity of participation. Because of this emphasis it is understandable that greater attention has been paid to how things were being said and how feelings and relations were within the group rather than on what was being discussed in the program. Major attention has been paid to the climate of the group, the broad leader-group relations and the inter-relationships between group members.

Assuming that these problems are understood, the central problem of group discussion now comes into focus: what are people saying and does what they are saying contribute to the learning of the group? This section, and the two following, deal with these problems of the discussion leader which are part of the thinking, deliberating job of the group.

No one can think with another person unless he understands the other person's meaning; this area is devoted to the problems which people have understanding one another.

Failure to Listen

The story is told about a deaf man named Tom who was proud of his ability to understand what people said, even though he could not read lips. One day he was working with a friend trimming a tree to make a pole for a well. After a while they saw a stranger coming down the road.

"See that fellow?" Tom said. "I can tell you just what he's going to say to me. He's going to say 'Hello,' and I'm going to say 'Hello.' Then he's going to ask what I'm cutting and I'm going to say I'm cutting a well pole. Then he's going to ask how far down I'm going to cut it, and I'm going to say down to that knothole down there. He's going to ask me how much I want for it and I'll say two dollars and seventy-five cents, and when he says he won't pay that much, I'll tell him somebody else will."

The stranger approached. "Hello," he said.

"Hello," said Tom.

Stranger: "Nice day, isn't it?"

Tom: "Well pole."

Stranger: "How far is it to the nearest inn?"

Tom: "Right down to that there knothole."

Stranger (a little confused): "How long will it take me to get there?"

Tom: "Two dollars and seventy-five cents."

Stranger (flushing): "Who do you think you're kidding? I've got a good mind to bop you in the nose."

Tom (triumphantly): "Well if you don't, somebody else will."

A simple failure to listen is a frequent cause of misunderstanding in any discussion group; people get so preoccupied by their own thoughts, or by what they want to say next, that they really don't pay enough attention to the person who is talking. The leader can help by paying close attention himself, thus presenting a good model for the others; and by pointing out the difficulty when one person begins to answer what

another has not said.

The Slipperiness of Words

Probably the greatest difficulty in communication, though, is simply the language we speak; it is a rich language, but its very richness means that it is full of double meanings, subtle meanings, and emotional tones. Unfortunately, people tend to feel that the words they use have fixed meanings which are the same for everybody. But the meaning which people attach to such words as "worker" or "employer," for example, depend a great deal on their individual experience with the reality signified by the words.

The leader can be of some help in clarifying apparent or real conflict in the group by making certain that the words people are using have the same general meaning for everyone in the group. He should not hesitate to question a group member to find out what he means, or to ask him to explain concretely if there is any doubt of his meaning. This is a fairly simple prescription for a complicated problem; the difficulty lies not in knowing what to do but in knowing when it needs to be done.

The Airiness of Abstractions

Some primitive cultures have languages which do not allow for abstractions; that is, all the nouns refer directly to a concrete thing. Our language permits us to move from very concrete objects (that cow named Bessie) to livestock, to farm assets, to wealth. Sometimes we get so abstract that we can carry on a fine discussion about a word like "freedom" without even knowing what kind of "freedom" everyone has in mind. Do we mean freedom from stone walls and bars? Or freedom to start a business and run it without interference? Or the freedom of anyone to buy a five million dollar newspaper? Or as a French wit put it, the freedom of everyone, including millionaires, to sleep on park benches? You will find fairly soon that when people use an abstraction like "freedom," they generally have some specific kind of free-ness in mind, and exclude a great many other concrete kinds of free-ness. A disucssion group devoted to serious issues these days finds it hard to avoid using the term "the free world," but most groups would have hard going indeed agreeing on what precise kinds of freedom are common to "the free world," or even what specific countries should be included in it. This does not mean that one can get along without abstractions, but the leader can help by making sure that when abstractions are discussed the real things or actions they refer to are made explicit.

S.I. Hayakawa describes the useful concept of the abstraction ladder in the following excerpt from his article, "Why We Must Abstract":

> Let's Define Our Terms ;"An extremely widespread instance of an unrealistic (and ultimately superstitious) attitude toward definitions is found in the common academic prescription, "Let's define our terms so that we shall all know what we are talking about." The fact that a golfer, for example, cannot define golfing terms is no indication that he cannot understand and use them. Conversely, the fact that

a man can define a large number of words is no guarantee that he knows what objects or operations they stand for in concrete situations. People often believe, having defined a word, that some kind of understanding has been established, ignoring the fact that the words in the definition often conceal even more serious confusions and ambiguities than the word defined. If we happen to discover this fact and try to remedy matters by defining the words, and then, finding ourselves still confused, go on to define the words in the definitions of the defining words, and so on, we quickly find ourselves in a hopeless snarl. The only way to avoid this snarl is to keep definitions to a minimum and to point to extensional levels wherever necessary--and in writing and speaking, this means giving specific examples of what we are talking about!"

"Ultimately, no adequate definition of "apple pie" can be given in words--one has to examine and taste an actual apple pie. The same goes for more abstract words. If we have never felt love, if we have never felt strongly about a moral principle nor felt the satisfactions of seeing a moral principle observed, we may verbally define "love" or "justice" until doomsday, but we shall not know what they mean."

Chasing Oneself in Verbal Circles: "In other words, the kind of "thinking" we must be extremely wary of is that which never leaves the higher verbal levels of abstraction, the kind that never points down the abstraction ladder to lower levels of abstraction and from there to the extensional world:

"What do you mean by democracy?"
"Democracy means the preservation of human rights."
"What do you mean by rights?"
"By rights I mean those privileges God grants to all of us--I mean man's inherent privileges."
"Such as?"
"Liberty, for example."
"What do you mean by liberty?"
"Religious and political freedom."
"And what does that mean?"
"Religious and political freedom is what we have when we do things in the democratic way."

'Of course it is possible to talk meaningfully about democracy, but such a sample as the above is not the way to do it. The trouble with speakers who never leave the higher levels of abstraction is not only that they fail to notice when they are not; they also produce a similar lack of discrimination in their audiences. Never coming down to earth, they frequently chase themselves around in verbal circles, unaware that they are making meaningless noises."

'This by no means is to say, however, that we must never make extensionally meaningless noises. When we use directive language, when we talk about the future, when we utter ritual language or engage in social conversation, we often make utterances that have no extensional verifiability. It must not be overlooked that our highest ratiocinative and imaginative powers are derived from the fact

that symbols are independent of things symbolized, so that we are free not only to go quickly from low to extremely high levels of abstraction (from "canned peas" to "groceries" to "commodities" to "national wealth") and to manipulate symbols even when the things they stand for cannot be so manipulated ("if all the freight cars in the country were hooked up to each other in one long line..."), but we are also free to manufacture symbols at will even if they stand only for abstractions made from other abstractions and not for anything in the extensional world. Mathematicians, for example, often play with symbols that have no extensional content, just to find out what can be done with them; this is called pure mathematics. Mathematicians, however, when they are dealing with extensionally meaningless symbols, usually know what they are doing. We likewise must know what we are doing. The fundamental purpose of the abstraction ladder is to make us aware of the process of abstracting." 2

Fuzzy Statements and Woolly Thoughts

The English language is a rich, powerful, and precise tool, and it's a pity that so few of us can speak it. College teachers blame the high schools, high schools blame the grammar schools, grammar schools blame the.....but, no matter; whoever is to blame, one of the constant tasks of the discussion leader is to clarify; to be forever alert to statements that seem meaningless, confused, off the point, or ambiguous. A common symptom of fuzziness can be recognized when two or three people, one after the other, say essentially the same thing, in a way that indicates that they are unaware that it has already been said. This may be merely an expression of a wanting to "get into the act," but it may also indicate a failure to listen or a continuous failure to have points made clear and understood.

It is reasonable for the leader to try to help, in these cases, by re-stating what the person has said, or by pointing out the similarity in a number of statements and suggesting what is common to them. But, be careful that ideas are not put into other peoples' heads; this is the ever-lurking danger in such a procedure. If the leader is not sure he has caught the real kernel of a confusing statement, he can ask the person to clarify instead of trying to state it in his own words.

The Durability of Values

Finally, people have difficulty communicating to one another when their basic values, what they think is good or bad, and right or wrong, are sharply different. When two people sit down in a restaurant, one orders lobster and the other says, "Lobster, ugh!" The conflict in values here is not very important. Confront them, however, with a choice of a farm bill which does away with parity payments to farmers in favor of payments for allowing land to lie fallow, and one which proposes 90% parity. One person may think that parity payments are pure socialism and unwarranted government interference in the economy; another may think that it is up to the government to redress the unfair position of one group in the economy. Values involving the responsibility of government for the economic positions of the citizens are implicit in both positions, but there is no way of proving these values--they are feelings of worth,

feelings that one thing is better than another thing.

Since values are held emotionally, and are bound to feelings, people may become defensive when their values are questioned or challenged. Keeping the discussion on a relatively objective level becomes very difficult. It is important for the leader to recognize a value conflict when it occurs and to urge the group to examine the consequences of holding the various values under question, rather than continuing to state and re-state them.

So when the group's difficulty seems to involve a problem of communication, it may be that:

1. People are not paying attention to what is being said.
2. They may be using the same words to mean different things.
3. They may be applying the same abstract term to different realities.
4. They may not be making themselves clear.
5. They may have a fundamental difference in the values they hold.

THE STRATEGY OF GROUP DELIBERATION

Previous pages have dealt with problems of creating a good climate for discussion, of securing the kind and quality of discussion necessary for effective learning, and with communication techniques.

Mastery of these skills is, however, not enough. The difference between a poor discussion and an effective one depends on the manner in which the discussion is conducted, the extent to which opinions and conclusions are related to the principles and facts which underlie them. It also depends on careful use of logic and reasoning. All of these, in turn, depend, in part, on the kinds of questions which are asked and how they are asked.

If people are to learn anything from one another besides a mere exchange of opinion, they must first learn to respect the process of thought itself and develop a wariness for the traps that await anyone who tries to think through an issue.

This section considers the strategy of discussion, the kind of over-all plan a leader needs to keep in mind.

Exploring an Issue

Many discussion groups get into trouble right at the beginning by ignoring the need to locate precisely what issue they are talking about. If the discussion is about the adequacy of United States foreign policy, for example, there is not much sense in retreating behind the usual prepared ramparts and banging away. The group needs first to determine:

> Whether it is useful to discuss what appear to be the basic assumptions behind present policies, or some specific examples of the application of policy.

If the former, what criteria should be used to judge the assumptions, and in what sequence they should be discussed.

If the latter, what specific case can be accepted by the group as a typical one.

The problem of strategy is half solved when this first step has been given enough attention, because nothing can be quite so confusing as to talk about a number of overlapping issues as though they were the same.

Once the group agrees on the issue it is discussing, the problem becomes one of exploring differing opinions. It is at this point that conflict can reasonably be expected, and whether the conflict is translated into a constructive learning experience or deteriorates into a snarl of personal antagonisms will depend to a great extent on the quickness and skill of the leader.

Since conflict can exist at any one of several levels, it is helpful for the leader to try to identify these levels during the discussion: a conflict may be on the superficial level of opinion or attitude; it may be on the level of evidence, or the meaning of facts which support the differing opinions; it may be on the deeper level of values or preferences. One difficulty to watch for occurs when a group operates at the same time on different levels and is unaware of doing do; one person may be arguing that democracy is a wonderful thing, another person that democracy won't work.

Conflict generally starts at the level of opinion, with members of the group stating widely different points of view. The most common problem, therefore, is that of starting with conclusions. One person may state that we should relax our trade barriers with the Soviet Union; another may be convinced that such a course is unwise. If the reasons which support each opinion are not stated with the opinion, they must be asked for. If each person is forced to state his position fully (and given a chance to do so!) the group can then assess how reasonable the positions are.

Assessing the reasonableness of a position is, in fact, the heart of such discussions. Two generally encountered blind alleys are (1) arguing about facts and (2) arguing about values. It isn't very useful to argue about facts, yet we spend a wearisome amount of time doing it. If people emerged from a subway station and began to argue about whether they were at 45th Street or 50th Street, we would consider them idiots for not looking up to read the street sign. One can discuss the significance of a fact, whether it makes any difference at all, or its possible <u>meaning</u>; but if the fact itself is in question, one can only agree on a way of finding out whether it is correct or not, or agree that its correctness cannot be determined.

Values are a different problem. Values are personal preferences which range from minor tastes for a certain kind of food as against others (did you ever try snails, or rattlesnake meat?) to beliefs in a certain concept of God, from a minor irritation with the man who doesn't open doors for the woman he is escorting to a determination to destroy anyone who believes in a different kind of social order. An argument about desegregation of schools in the South, for instance, might resolve very quickly into conflicts of values about whether the Negro, essentially, is a human being or something else not specified.

Values present problems for discussion, then, because there is very little to be gained by arguing about preferences. Peoples' values <u>can</u> change in a group situation; but only when the group can agree on a standard to which it can apply pressure to

conform. We catch most of our values when we are very young, and from people who are very important to us emotionally. While it is not useful to argue about values, it is highly desirable to think through their consequences; if you like green apples, it is useful to know that stomach aches sometimes follow a green apple debauch.

It is important for other reasons that people know and understand the widest range of values that exist around them; it may not change their own beliefs, but in a complex civilization like ours it exerts a wonderfully calming influence and often represents the difference between a naive and a sophisticated view of the world.

Selecting and Phrasing the Questions

One of the most important and effective ways of avoiding the confusion of discussing at several levels at once is the intelligent selection and phrasing of questions.

Selection of Questions

The leader, by his selection of a question for discussion and the sequence in which these questions are asked, can pre-determine the kind of discussion which will ensue. He can - by choice of question - determine whether the discussion will deal with an examination of facts, with an interchange about values, or with a free-wheeling analysis of opinions held by the group. By his decision as to sequence of questions he can also decide whether discussion will move from facts to values and then to opinions which grow out of these values or whether, in reverse, discussion will start at the point of opinions and then push back to values and facts underlying those opinions.

Let us look at one example - illustrating how selection of questions will determine the kind of discussion. Jefferson and Our Times deals with the problem of "Freedom of the Press" in Session 5 and uses the recording "The Experiment of a Free Press."

Let us examine three of these questions and illustrate how by one selection the leader might move from facts to opinions:

Q. 6. "Are there any limitations on freedom of discussion in the press or radio in our country now? If so, how have they been imposed?"

(This question clearly calls for a review of facts and would start the discussion by securing certain facts which can be used as a back-drop for further discussion. If the group is not in possession of the facts it might call for further reading or for a resource person.)

Q. 7. "Do you believe that the private lives of public men should be exempt from public discussion? Why? Do you think that most people would agree?"

(This question, although one of opinion on the surface, clearly will call for some analysis of individual values which underlie the opinions as well as for some analysis of values which are generally held.)

Q. 2. "Do you think that rights should be more limited in times of 'cold war' than in those of peace?"

(Although this question may relate somewhat to values, it is stated primarily in terms of opinion and would clearly lead to a discussion of opinions. The extent to which these opinions were back-stopped by values or by experiences substantiating the opinions will depend entirely on the extent to which the discussion leader asks supplementary questions which call for examination of reasons underlying the opinions.)

It is apparent that in the sequence followed above discussion would move from a consideration of facts to values and then to opinions. On the other hand, the leader might decide to start with Question 2, dealing with opinions first and then move back to a consideration of values. There is not necessarily one best way but it is important that the leader know what he is doing, decide beforehand on his strategy, and then fit the sequence of questions to this strategy.

Phrasing of Questions

The trend of the discussion can be determined also by the way in which a question is phrased. Phrasing it one way will lead to a discussion of facts, in another, discussion will concern itself with values. Let us look at one question which can be phrased to bring about several kinds of discussion: Session 7 of Jefferson and Our Times deals with "The Nature of Revolution" and uses the recording "The Democrat and the Commissar." Let us now assume that the discussion leader is interested in having the group make some comparisons between the American Revolution and the Communist revolution. By phrasing the question in three different ways he can call for three entirely different kinds, or levels, of comparison. For example:

Q. 1. With respect to the following factors, in what ways were the American and Russian revolutions similar or dissimilar:

a. An effort to throw off domination of a foreign power?
b. Revolt against the domination of a tyrannical group?
c. A protest against unfair and unequal economic burdens and privileges?
d. Each revolution was followed by a period of tyranny and dictatorship?
e. Each was, in effect, a class war?
f. Each revolution was staged, planned and operated by a small minority group. Only a small portion of the population actually knew what it was all about?

(Phrasing the question in this way the leader calls for a comparison of facts-insofar as they can be drawn from the group, the recording and the supplementary readings. Where there is strong disagreement in the group with respect to any point the disagreement can better be settled by resort to authorities than by attempting to arrive at a consensus since there is just as good a chance that the majority might be wrong as right on the facts.)

Q. 2. Based on your knowledge of the literature published by those concerned with the American Revolution and those concerned with the Russian revolution what would you say the major values of each group were with respect to:

a. Individual liberty and freedom?
b. Sovereignty of the state?
c. Freedom of religion?
d. Conformity vs. individuality?
e. The family?

(Phrasing the question in this way, the leader calls for a comparison of values rather than facts. On the other hand, he suggests that source material - the writings of each group - be utilized to support the ideas of group members about the values held by each group of revolutionists. He does not ask for opinions as to which values are best but merely attempts to develop some understanding of the similarities and differences in values so that the differences in the two situations may be better understood.

Q. 3, In what ways do you think that the American Revolution was more consistent with the basic ideas of democracy and Chirstianity than the Russian revolution?

(Phrasing the question in this way calls for a discussion of opinion based primarily on the individual member's own opinions and beliefs.)

Reviewing the three questions outlined above, it is apparent that all of them deal with a comparison between the two revolutions but each deals with it in a different way and each question will call for a completely different kind of discussion on a completely different level.

Predetermined Answers

Not only can the selection and phrasing of questions call for discussion at different levels but also questions can - and frequently do - call for, suggest, and demand, certain kinds of answers. For example, Question 3 clearly prejudges the situation and already - by the way it is phrased - prejudges a prior question which might well have been considered with respect to the ways in which the two revolutions differed with respect to democratic and Christian ideas and values. Too frequently, leaders' opinions, values and prejudices are shown in the way they phrase and ask questions.

Two other kinds of questions should be avoided if an effective and educative discussion is desired.

First is the "fuzzy, mixed-up" question, the major outcome of which will be lengthy discussion about what the question means rather than about the substance of it. For example:

> "Some people say that there is too much freedom of discussion on the radio and on TV and others disagree. Both sides have some merit. What do you think?"

(In this case the areas of disagreement are not defined or spelled out. The issue to be discussed is not clear, and as a result, the members of the group will have to spend considerable time determining what should be discussed.)

Second is the question which calls primarily for agreement or disagreement with

a statement, or for a "yes" or "no" answer without calling for any discussion of underlying facts, values or reasons for the answer. For example:

> "During the past few years many people have recommended that the federal government be empowered to censor TV programs for children so that the present over-emphasis on crime and violence can be reduced. Do you agree or disagree with these recommendations?"

(In this case, in addition to the fact that the question calls only for an affirmative or negative reply without calling for any reasons for the reply, the question also makes a number of assumptions without calling for any examination of them. Such assumptions are: that there is an over-emphasis on crime and violence; and that the present emphasis is necessarily bad.)

But the Leader Alone Doesn't Set Direction

Although it is true that by his selection and phrasing of questions the leader can do much to determine the direction of the discussion, he must also reckon with the desires of the group. He may well decide that he wants to move discussion from opinions back to values and facts, but the group might decide that they first want to discuss facts. If they have been meeting together for some time they may well take the ball away from the leader.

This suggests the importance of the leader discussing with the group his plan of action and his strategy of discussion. In many cases it will be wise for the leader to point out that in the discussion he plans to move from facts to opinions or vice versa and to sound out the group on their agreement to the procedure. If, for good reasons, the group disagrees and wishes to reverse the procedure suggested by the leader it will probably be better to move with the group rather than having the leader and group work at cross-purposes.

Relation of Conclusions or Opinions to Underlying Principles

Everyone has opinions, draws conclusions about the world; many of the things he forms opinions about he has had little experience with. How does he form them then? Sometimes he takes another's word-- the columnist, the radio newscaster, the weekly magazine, or Joe, the bartender at the corner tavern.

But very often, he makes up his mind, consciously or not, by appeal to some principle which he has accepted long ago. To take a very simple case: Given a large boy beating up a small boy on a street corner, the sympathy of the gathering crowd will be with the small boy; at least two common principles vaguely recognized by most Americans have come into play--sympathy for the "underdog" and "fair play." Suppose the small boy to be a vicious juvenile delinquent who has just hit the large boy's sister on the head with a baseball bat; the crowd knows not, nor does it care to find out.

On a more complicated level of, say, the good and bad in art, or public issues, the principle is less often visible to the person who holds it. One who says, "I don't know anything about art, but I know what I like," generally has a principle lurking

somewhere which he uses to judge what he likes. It may be something like "Good art reflects a recognizable and real world" or "Good art has a little sentiment to it," but it is an artistic principle just the same.

It is a good indication that underlying principles are operating in a discussion when all sides expressed seem to have an equally valid set of facts to back up their opinions. Members of the group can then hurl the facts at one another for a considerable period of time without getting down to the real root of the issue.

Summary

Summarizing this brief discussion of selecting and phrasing questions, for the purpose of bringing about meaningful and logical discussion, here are a few recommended principles for use:

1. Before the discussion is started, decide what the strategy of the discussion should be with respect to the level of discussion. Should it concern itself primarily with opinions, with values or with facts? Should it move from one level to another, and in what direction?

2. Having decided on the basic strategy for the discussion, select the questions to be included and the sequence of the questions so that they will implement the decision on strategy.

3. Test each question yourself to make sure that it really does deal with only one level and that the participants know what kind of discussion is called for. Avoid and eliminate questions which are fuzzy and which permit each member of the group to place his own interpretation on the kind of discussion which is appropriate.

4. Make sure that questions are not "loaded," that they do not have some predetermined answer built into them. Test the question to ensure that widely differing and varying points of view (if it relates to opinions or values) are called for and that judgments are not already made as to what values and opinions are acceptable and not acceptable.

5. In questions which attempt to get at facts, be sure that the kinds of facts are made clear. Don't suggest the answer in the question,but do state very clearly in what area or areas answers are desired.

6. In selecting questions, remember that you can move in two directions: either from facts and values to opinions; or from opinions back to the values and facts on which the opinions are based. If you start at opinions, however, there is very little that is truly educative if you don't help to move the group back to consideration of underlying facts and values (unless you are merely conducting a public opinion poll).

7. Discuss your strategy with the group. Let them help to decide how, and in what direction, the discussion should be structured.

TACTICS OF GROUP DELIBERATION

This section deals with some problems of tactics, the constantly, recurring difficulties of testing assertions and opinions. The process of reasoning has been studied for several thousands of years and a fair-sized mountain of thinking about thinking has accumulated as a result. Briefly described below are some of the more common errors that muddy the waters of discussion which the leader can learn through experience to do something about.

"Irrelevant, immaterial, and incompetent!"

One of the reasons that proceedings in the courts of law are so interminable is that the courts, out of a long and honorable tradition, insist on paying very close attention to the nature of every piece of evidence that is admitted to consideration. Such care is mainly for the protection of the individual under charge. Opinions or ideas offered in a discussion should not be convicted or acquitted either, without a careful look at the evidence on which they are based. Watch out for:

Whether the facts offered justify the conclusion or are insufficient or irrelevant to it.

Whether the use of an authority as evidence is justified by the qualifications of the authority: Is he in a position to know or interpret the facts by reason of background, knowledge, or experience? Does he have a special interest, concealed or open? Is his statement supported by evidence or based only on his opinion?

Whether examples offered as evidence are valid in terms of (1) their representativeness (one sample of almost anything is meaningless, and the characteristics of your next door neighbor cannot be cited as typical of any group, unless you have reason to know he is typical), and (2) their relation to the issue under discussion.

Is Your Premise Missing?

Most conclusions and opinions are based on underlying premises, which are often imperfectly stated and can easily lead to confusion in the group. To give an oversimple example, a person who is opposed to the giving of foreign aid by the United States may well take the discussion off on the issue of whether inflation lowers the standard of living. It is quite remarkable how often a group will permit itself to be seduced onto such a tangent, when the real question is whether foreign aid will cause inflation, which was the original person's unvoiced premise.

Watch out for:

The giving of an opinion without reasons to support it. There is otherwise no basis for forming a judgment of it.

Too ready and unanimous agreement on a controversial issue--it is easy to agree

on conclusions for significantly different reasons.

Logic and Ill-logic

Like Moliere's character who learned to his astonishment that he had spoken prose all his life, many people would be surprised if they knew how often they used the syllogism. The critic of a political appointee who says that "Smith, like all Communists, believes in de-segregation, and, therefore, he is a Communist," is using a syllogism, though a faulty one.

Thus:

All communists believe in de-segregation.
Smith believes in de-segregation.
Therefore Smith is a communist.

In the syllogism there is always a major premise, or general proposition; a minor premise, or particular case; and a conclusion, or inference drawn from the relationship between these two. What would make this correct as a syllogism? If the major premise were to be changed to "Only Communists believe in de-segregation," the conclusion would logically follow. Please note, however, that it is only logically true; its truth would then depend on an ability to prove both the minor and the major premise. Logic is not concerned with the truth of statements; it is concerned with whether they relate consistently to one another.

Logic always says, IF such-and-such is true, THEN something or other follows. It works the other way around, too. Instead of starting with a general proposition, as we did above, one can start with particular cases and try to generalize from them, in an attempt to establish a general law. This process, called induction, is subject to many errors, though it has proved a valuable way of proceeding for both the physical and social science. It is also the process which people misuse when they say things like, "A long-haired fellow shoved me in the bus today--aren't long-haired people the most awful people!"

Watch out for:

Conclusions which are "valid" because they correctly follow from a general proposition, but which might not be correct if the general proposition itself is false.

Generalizations which are based on questionable or incomplete data; see again our previous point under evidence.

The False Analogy

Whenever you use a familiar image or experience to explain another, more difficult idea, you make the assumption that the two things are alike enough to enable you to transfer meaning from one to the other. For example, Carlyle's argument against representative government points out that this kind of government is bound to fail since a ship could never be taken around Cape Horn if the captain were obliged to

consult the crew every time before changing course.

But if the generalization made (that the sharing of power involves a lack of efficiency) is true, the obvious differences between a ship and a government are so great that caution is necessary. It would be simple, of course, to make the argument without using the analogy; one can make a case, presumably, for outlawing the use of analogy in discussion altogether. It would be a pity, though; analogies can mislead, true enough, but they can also be a powerful stimulant to imaginative thought. Perhaps it is enough to have them bear the cautionary label: USE WITH CARE.

Watch out for:

Whether the two circumstances compared are really similar.

Whether the analogy disregards fundamental differences and stresses only superficial points of similarity.

Whether a general rule is based on an analogy, which is merely a single example.

Cause and Effect

Someone has pointed out gleefully that there is a close statistical relationship between the salaries of Presbyterian ministers in Massachusetts and the price of rum in Havana. Does the one cause the other? We hope not. Lots of things vary in the same direction and at the same time, but there need not be a causal relationship between them.

The discussion leader needs to be tough about this element of the discussion. He can be so by raising a question, whenever a group member does not, about any blandly stated causal connection.

Watch out for:

Whether the asserted causal connection really can be demonstrated.

Whether the cause is sufficient to produce the effect. The export of rootabaga from Ajerbaijan can actually have very little to do with the frequency of H-bomb tests, nor did the assassination of obscure royalty have much to do with World War I.

Whether there are any other factors operating which might be a more important cause than the asserted one.

Drawing Conclusions from a Given Set of Facts

As we have pointed out before, as soon as one says IF this is so, THEN the following is also true, a process of reasoning becomes involved. Let us suppose that the IF statement involved is only a guess, or an assumption; for example, "The Soviet Union is probably preparing to attack the United States within the next three years, and IF this is true, THEN United States foreign policy should take the following course... .." In this case you are in double trouble; not only must you be careful that the conclusions you come to in the final part of the sentence are consistent with your assumption, but the truth of the entire statement depends on your ability to prove the original assumption, the IF part of the proposition.

However great the difficulty, reasoning very often must proceed from assumptions which are not subject to immediate investigation or proof. The reasoning process is somewhat clearer, though, if the basis for the reasoning is an indisputable fact; the question of how valid the original assumption is does not then arise.

What the Leader Can Do

To help group deliberation, the leader at various times may have to make sure that:

1. People distinguish between facts and opinions in the arguments advanced.
2. Opinions are neither accepted or dismissed without careful consideration of:
   a. the reliability of the evidence.
   b. the logic or ill-logic of the reasoning.
3. People state all the premises from which they are arguing.
4. Analogies are used and weighed with caution.
5. Cause and effect relationships stated or implied are examined critically.
6. The group continues to push back to causes.
7. Each point of agreement and disagreement is noted and clarified as the discussion moves along.

EVALUATION AND PROGRAM APPLICATION

It has been the intention of this manual to provide some basic understanding of the value of group discussion, of the factors which contribute to effective participation, improved communication, and creative thinking.

At this point, two things remain to be done. First, is a need to understand better what is involved in a sound program of evaluation and then to apply this understanding to a broad evaluation of the program (so that it can be used later in evaluating programs led in the field). Second, is the very practical problem of planning next steps: how to organize a program in the community; what discussion program to select; how to get going; and when to move.

The first half of this section will, therefore, deal with the theoretical problem of evaluating discussion programs. The second will provide some practical suggestions for getting started on a program and an opportunity for members of the group to compare notes on what they plan to do.

Meaning and Purpose of Program Evaluation

Evaluation is a term which has been used widely, frequently, and usually, very loosely.

It means many things to different people. To many, however, evaluation nowadays is synonomous with a little sheet passed out at the end of a session that provides participants an opportunity to give testimony about how much they liked the session,

the leader, and whether they got little, something, a lot, or a great deal out of the program. Unfortunately, evaluation (which is really a process carried out for a certain purpose) has been confused with an instrument or device that may, or may not, be used as part of the process of a sound evaluation.

Defining the Term

Let us start out, therefore, by defining what the term evaluation means, and then arrive at some understanding of the purpose of evaluation.

To arrive at a definition we must relate evaluation to the programs we are working with. The discussion programs that we as leaders will be concerned with are all educational. By education we mean a process whereby certain desired changes are brought about in the behavior of individuals or groups. (Changes in behavior include changes in thinking, feeling and acting.) In all of these discussion programs, then, there are certain goals and objectives which relate to desired behavioral changes in persons who participate in the programs.

For example, in Ways of Mankind the program aims at helping the participants get a "real understanding of the major issues in human behavior." The program in the Humanities, according to the authors, aims at giving the participants a "grasp of the magnitude of the humanistic inquiry and knowledge...a conception of what distinguishes the humanities from other fields of knowledge...immediate pleasures in the arts of reading, looking and listening which are the foundation of the enjoyment and appreciation of the creative achievements of mankind." Jefferson and Our Times is concerned, "not with history as such, nor with a biography of Jefferson, but with the ideas which give meaning to both and which will live in our age long after the death of the Father of the Republic."

With respect to each of these programs there are certain stated goals related to changes in understanding, appreciation, attitudes or action which are desired.

Sound program evaluation is a process that attempts to determine the extent to which these stated changes in behavior have in fact been brought about during the process of the program.

Returning to the programs mentioned above: a sound evaluation of a Ways of Mankind program will attempt to determine the degree to which participants have increased "their real understanding of the major issues in human behavior." Likewise, one evaluation of the course in Humanities will be an effort to determine to what extent participants actually are deriving greater "pleasure in the arts of reading, looking and listening."

Its Purpose

So much for the definition of what is meant by evaluation. Now let us examine very briefly the purpose of evaluation. It is not for the purpose of patting ourselves on the back nor to build up the ego of the discussion leader. It is not for the purpose of showing that people can be recruited for discussion programs and can be induced to stay for the duration - although this may be one measure of the attitude of the

participants. The basic and major purpose of evaluation is:

> To determine whether a program has been effective in bringing about certain desired changes (of the kind mentioned above), to discover what factors in the program were responsible for success or failure in bringing about such changes and, finally, to amend or change the program in such a manner that these desired changes may be better achieved.

Relating this to an example, the purpose of evaluating a course in Ways of Mankind is: first to determine to what extent the participants did improve their "understanding of the major issues of human behavior"; second, to determine what factors (in the materials, the leadership, the methods used, etc.) were responsible for making it possible to achieve the changes, and what factors interfered with greater achievement; and third, to change or alter the program so that greater changes (in line with the goals) can be made in future programs.

Such an evaluation might suggest that the leadership did not offer members of the group sufficient time to gain a real understanding of the points discussed and, as a result, next time the program is run more opportunity should be permitted for discussion. Or the evaluation might suggest that some of the materials were confusing or too difficult and that participants were unable to understand them. As a result, such materials should either be modified or eliminated. Or again, - as previously suggested in this manual - the evaluation might indicate that the questions in some cases were so phrased that the resultant discussion was not helpful or constructive. In this case, the leader can re-phrase or change his questions next time.

Essential Steps in Evaluation

No attempt will be made to set forth an elaborate outline of the techniques for a complicated and involved process of evaluating each course that may conceivably be run. The proposed essential steps are simple ones that any good leader can apply in his own group and that will be effective in helping him to improve his performance in running subsequent programs.

The first essential step in evaluation is:

A clear cut statement of program goals and objectives.

Each course should include some statement of goals and objectives. It is the responsibility of the leader to emphasize and discuss these goals with the participants in the beginning of the program so that there is common agreement on the kinds of behavioral changes (not necessarily defined in those terms) which the program is aiming at. It is important that participants, as well as the leader, be aware of these desired goals.

Some device or technique be used to determine whether goals have been achieved.

Such device may consist of a questionnaire or form that is worked out to test the extent to which the objectives have been achieved - an objective multiple choice test, an essay or a free-response questionnaire. Or it might consist of small group discussion, during the last session, of the extent to which different program objectives

have been achieved. Observers, also, can be helpful in keeping an eye on the discussion and attempting to interpret which of the objectives have been effectively achieved and which have not.

The third essential step is:

To analyze the results of the evaluation and to use them in improving the next program.

After reviewing and discussing the evaluation with the participants, much help can be secured from them in suggesting how the goals might be better achieved next time. As participants, they are in the best position to suggest what material has been most helpful - and at least, what techniques were most productive, what kinds of discussions helped to achieve the goals. Based on the analysis by the group, reactions from observers and the experience - and insights gained by the evaluation - of the leader, it should then be possible to plan for improving the program the next time that it is run.

Evaluation Payoffs

A frequent reaction to the subject of evaluation is that it is too complicated, too pedantic, too theoretical and too academic. Many people say, "We know how good the program is by the reactions of the participants," "We can tell how the course is going by the number of people who show up," or "Any good leader can tell whether the program is successful or not."

All of these statements are certainly true in part. At the same time it is pretty hard to tell merely by intuition what the participants have got out of the program or how it can be improved.

A sound evaluation - one which attempts to determine the extent to which the goals have been achieved and the ways in which they can be better achieved in the future - has these very practical pay-offs:

First, the leader himself will have a greater feeling of security and satisfaction if he really knows to what extent the desired goals have been achieved.

Second, by pin-pointing the goals and emphasizing them both for himself and for the participants, the program itself will be improved, since both leader and participants will continually be referring to the goals to determine whether they are making progress and how they can make better progress.

Third, through such evaluation it is possible for the leader to improve continually his own performance and to improve the materials and his methods so that the program will have increasing value as he continues to act as a leader.

Fourth, the leader himself continues to learn and to grow and improve himself as a leader.

Fifth, the participants, as they are involved in the process of evaluation, become more identified with the program and will be more interested in participating in future programs.

Sixth, the kind of program evaluation used in this manual provides an effective method for reviewing the major content of a program.

Seventh, the entire program will be improved and the basic aspects of a democratic discussion program will be carried into practice by involving participants in the

evaluation process and by permitting them to help in improving the program.

Review: Four Major Objectives of this Manual

1) Increasing sensitivity to the major factors involved in a discussion program.
2) Increasing understanding of the importance and value of group discussion.
3) Increased skill in diagnosing problems which a leader must handle.
4) Experience in leading discussion in order to build leadership skills.

General questions to be asked in evaluating the extent to which the program has been effective in achieving each of the above objectives:

Question 1: Based on discussion - and readings - in this program, summarize briefly the major factors leading to achievement of this objective.

Question 2: What new or different insights, knowledge or understanding did you get from this program with respect to this objective?

Question 3: In what ways do you think this objective might have been better achieved?

Question 4: With respect to this objective, what parts of the program do you feel were:
a. most helpful?
b. least helpful?

Question 5: As far as the entire program is concerned:
a. What did you feel was most stimulating to you, and what was most helpful practically?
b. What portions of the program were least helpful and might be eliminated in the future?

PROGRAM APPLICATION

The most satisfactory evaluation of this manual can be made only in terms of what leaders actually do when they organize and operate discussion programs of their own. This realistic evaluation will be in terms of how to go about organizing and setting up a program, how to select materials and questions within the program, how to create a climate that permits participation and discussion, and how to move this discussion on toward more effective communication and reasoning.

The purpose of this last portion of the manual is to help to build a bridge from this practice, theoretical situation to the very practical and realistic one confronting leaders when they actually start setting up programs.

There are no pat formulae to use in this process. No one person has an answer that will serve equally well for all leaders and for all communities. There are, however, certain steps which must be gone through before a program can get under way. Up to now we have been talking about what to do - and how to do it - once the program begins. Now we must turn our attention to the preliminaries - how to gather a group and prepare them for the first meeting.

Questions to be Answered in Program Planning

Question 1: What are the first steps you would take in setting up a group for the program?

a. Do you know of any groups that are already organized who might be interested? Who are they?

b. If you know of no already organized groups, where would you start to recruit members for a group?

Question 2: In trying to set up a program - either through an already existing group or through contacts with individuals - what would you emphasize primarily in terms of stimulating interest in the program?

Question 3: Where do you think you will plan to hold your program - private home, university, or elsewhere? Why?

Question 4: What help or assistance will you want from some community center in getting your program organized and under way? (materials, brochures, lists, etc.)

Basic Qualities of Discussion Groups

Summary of the Film HOW TO CONDUCT A DISCUSSION

If we are to keep our democracy great and strong, we need to discuss and counsel together. And if we are to have discussions, we must have those who can lead them, who can, in groups that are small enough so that each person may contribute, bring harmony and unity out of difference, apathy, and discord. If one is to be a good leader, one must know the principles on which good discussion operates. What are these principles?

The question was asked of over fifty groups. Each one was called upon to consider the elements of a good group discussion, basing its judgment on an examination of its own experience. These groups were markedly different in their origin, their purpose, and the nature of the discussion procedures they follow. Naturally enough, there were many differences of opinion as to what a good discussion should be. But there was a solid core of agreement on two main points.

To begin with, most people agreed about the qualities that a good discussion leader should have. He should be intelligent. He should be interested in people and the people in his group should be interested in him and respect him. He ought to be able to draw people out. He ought to be able to provide balance and not just express his own point of view. He ought to have as broad experience as possible. These ideals are general and hard to achieve; nonetheless, when one starts out to find good leaders, it is well to know what one is looking for.

The second point of general agreement concerned the basic qualities of a good discussion group. It was clear from an analysis of the answers of fifty-odd responses that there are eleven such qualities:

1. The physical setting should be attractive and comfortable.
2. There should be a good social feeling.
3. The leader should have a basic plan but be flexible in his use of it.
4. There should be direct interchange among the group members.
5. The path of progress should be kept open for each individual member.
6. The experience of the members of the group should be used to enrich the discussion.
7. All the members should feel a responsibility for the effective conduct of the group.
8. All members of the group should understand both the immediate and the ultimate goals.
9. Methods and procedures should be as varied as possible.
10. The group should base the discussion on facts and experience as well as opinion.
11. All the members of the group should try to improve the group performance.

A leader must evaluate himself too. He can improve in no other way. At the close of each session, he should ask himself honestly and directly how well he got the group to demonstrate each of these eleven qualities in the discussion he has just led. He must practice and reflect, practice and reflect. Gradually he will learn to use all of the various principles and techniques almost automatically. Only then will he be a good discussion leader.

[1]Ida Stewart Hill, "Why Group Discussion," as reprinted in Leading Group Discussion, Part II Supplementary Readings (Chicago: CSLEA, 1954), pp. 2-5.

[2]S. I. Hayakawa, "Why We Must Abstract," as reprinted in Leading Group Discussion, PartII Supplementary Readings, pp. 48-51.

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